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ABSTRACT

Examining two very different contexts, a non-pastoral Quaker meeting and an AIDS hospice, offers insight into the complex nature of writing and literacy in spiritual contexts. Such a program is unapologetically comparative, seeking not the "right" view of spirituality but rather a view of how spirituality is expressed through language. Specific considerations were: (1) how the researcher can know when he or she has located a spiritual site of composing; and (2) how a text produced in one mode--whether spoken, written or signed--is related to a text that might be produced or have been produced in another. In a Quaker meeting spoken messages generally contain a narrative of sorts followed by a lesson or observation. Furthermore, bulletin boards, newsletters, tracts, and pamphlets are all forms of literacy circulated at Quaker meetings. As a communal production, the state of the meeting report raises important questions for literacy: How might this text be seen as a manifestation of spirituality? What can it teach us about spiritual sites of composing? The 12 steps that lead to the document's production are worth examining. Similarly, a number of literate activities are at work at an AIDS hospice: keeping of journals, reading silently or aloud, record keeping, labeling of medicines. Should the AIDS hospice be thought of then as a spiritual state of composing? (Contains a copy of state of the meeting report.) (TB)

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ED 374 440

LANGUAGE, LITERACY, AND SPIRITUALITY IN A QUAKER MEETING AND AN AIDS HOSPICE

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I stand before you today in several capacities. As a sociolinguist, I am especially interested the question of how humans use language—spoken, signed, or written—to communicate information about not only what they perceive the world to be like but also themselves, who they are and are not, whom they wish to be seen as being like or not like, in short, information about the self and the other. As a student of literacy and writing, I am concerned with the sorts of questions I pose in number I. below. As a believer, I am concerned with how to bring together the life of my mind—my intellectual world—and the habits of being that are part of my spiritual life. As a gay man, this problem is especially complex. After all, many religious or spiritual traditions, including the one into which I was born, greet me with exclusion, promising acceptance, even unconditional love, if only I will change a part of myself that seems so basic, so intrinsically everything that I am and whatever gifts I might have been blessed with, that if I were to change, I would be someone else, someone I wasn't and wouldn't be very happy as. Finally, I speak as a participant, by which I mean the information I'm going to share with you is not the result of the systematic participant/observation I associate with thorough ethnography; rather, it is only the result of observations that I as a participant have made over a number of years.

In the next few minutes, moving among the roles I've just outlined, I will quickly examine two very different contexts, a non-pastoral unprogrammed Quaker meeting and an AIDS hospice, and consider how each offers us insight into the complex nature of writing and literacy in spiritual contexts, specifically, how the literate practices in each situation might teach us something about language, written language, and spirituality. As the questions in I. below should make clear, such a program is unapolgetically comparative, seeking not the 'correct' or 'right' view of spirituality, but seeking to understand how spirituality is expressed through language or silence across cultures and communities.

I. Some questions that prompt my thinking:

1) How can we, as researchers, know when we have located a spiritual site of composing? Are some contexts, settings, or participant structures essentially spiritual, regardless of what occurs there? Can any context become such a site? To what extent is the answer dependent on physical setting, participants, behavior, intention, language used?

2) When considering spiritual sites of composing where composing is related to the production of written texts, how much of what we observe about dialect (recurring variety of language relating to social characteristics of the user), register (recurring variety of language related to context of use), and genre (recurring message form) is a function of language use in the spiritual context itself (i.e., what is the relationship of spoken/signed and written language in this context)? What are the complex ways in which texts produced in one mode—whether spoken, written, or signed—are related to texts that might be produced or have been produced in the other? How does each occurrence of spoken/signed or written language bear evidence of other uses of language, spoken/signed or written, in this context?

3) What makes language in spiritual sites spiritual? In what ways is it a matter of ritual (systematic repetition of an action or series of actions, likely involving a particular mental state of the participant(s) among other things)? In what ways is it a matter of belief in magic (some supernatural force or power)?

4) How much of the work that written language plays in a spiritual context can be related to the fact that the existence of institutions of many types simply assumes the widespread use of literacy, although the uses of literacy, access to them, and the power to perform them may be differentially distributed across participants? Of course, the same sort of question could be posed about the institutional role of spoken or signed language and unequal access. What do these issues of differential access have to teach us about the nature of language, social interaction, imagined communities, or spirituality?

First, I will turn to the issue of literacy in Quaker Meetings. Quaker Meetings, especially those that are non-pastoral and unprogrammed meetings, might seem a bizarre place to consider in terms of the intersection of literacy and spirituality. Although there have been many, not very good discussions of spoken messages during Quaker meeting for Worship and some discussion of Quaker consensus, there is little else in the academic literature. There are certainly no discussions of Quaker literacy. After all, members and attenders come, they sit in the silence of expectation, and after a period of centering down, or settling in, should someone feel so led, she or he rises and delivers a message. After a period of silence, someone else might speak, often on a very different topic. Over the hour, the messages may or may not appear to have some sort of internal coherence, and some Meetings are completely silent. At the end of the hour, the clerk signals the meeting's end by shaking hands with the persons to his or her right or left. There are announcements, and people leave. No bulletins. No reading aloud from a text, whether holy writ or a prepared sermon. No placards showing hymns for the day. In most cases, no hymnbooks.

Some of you present, especially those of you from more high church backgrounds, may wonder where the spirituality is. I can assure you Quakers believe and feel it is there. But most of you might wonder if there is literacy and where it is. Well, I can assure you it is there, too, permeating many aspects of the meeting. Messages that are delivered generally contain a narrative of sorts followed by a lesson or observation. Thinking of them as a genre, or recurring message type, we can note that they frequently involve the quoting of something read. The genre's structure might be seen as a slight departure from the kind of narrative taught and rewarded from preschool on, the very sort of narrative Deena and other African-American kids had trouble within Sarah Michaels' work, yet the kind that is assumed in Quaker meetings. Thus, I don't think we'd have to argue too hard to make a strong case that such a narrative is intimately tied with knowledge of certain kinds of written texts and with certain conventions for using them.

Although there is little or no overt direct evidence of literacy during worship, there is literacy all around. Bulletin boards. Newsletters containing announcements and minutes of the previous month's Meeting for Business. Tracts and pamphlets. Signs to encourage the responsible use of resources. And there is a document called the state of the meeting report, at least in meeting I attend and the regional yearly meeting with which it affiliates. I've given you a sample of such a document in the appendix. As noted in II., the audiences for this document are many. As II. likewise details, the creation of this document is a communal task, involving a number of individuals and groups over a period of time. The document itself has the traces of much spoken and written language, and to failure to appreciate that fact is to miss much of the significance that all insiders would attach to it. How might we see this text as a manifestation of spirituality? What can it teach us about spiritual sites of composing? about Quaker views of spirituality in particular? These are the sorts of questions I think we might profitably investigate.

II. Background information on the text in the appendix.

Known audiences for the text:

The Meeting itself (those who attended the retreat and those who did not)
Those who receive the Meeting's newsletter, wherever they may be
The yearly (regional) meeting, which will use the information to write its annual report
God (?), though some in the Meeting might object to such a formulation

Functions:

To assess the spiritual state of the Meeting, from the perspective of the previous year and previous years
To help the Meeting plan for the coming year(s)
To provide a record (i.e., written record) of the Meeting's activities during the year, including births, marriages, and deaths, a tradition that dates to early Quaker history when a point was made of recording rites of passage as well as Friends who were currently imprisoned because of their beliefs.

The document's creation

1) Early November during the separate committee meetings of the Oversight Committee and the Worship and Ministry Committee, a date for the January retreat was set and volunteers were sought to help organize the retreat.
2) Early December, a committee of three representing the two committees got together for a meal; afterwards, they planned the retreat, coming up with a two-page handout of queries (questions) to be considered at the retreat; the questions themselves came from North Pacific Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice, a book that outlines the ways in which that yearly meeting currently understands Quaker practice. Copies of the handout were made available at the Meetings for Worship until the retreat occurred. The handout let people know what kinds of issues would be considered at the retreat, helping them prepare themselves. [Note the use of a written text as structuring prompt for later talk, some of which would be premeditated. Note, too, that the written text itself was the product of talk about another written text.]
3) The retreat was held. One member of the committee to organize the retreat clerked (i.e., led) the meeting, which lasted from 9-3 on a Saturday. The other two committee members took notes, one providing a running commentary, the other listing topics and summarizing them. Both note-takers made notes of who said what. [Note that from a sociolinguistic perspective, we might consider the retreat a speech event and a literacy event, even for those who did not write, because they referred to the list of queries as they meditated and talked, and a written text was used to structure the entire event. During the discussions, the clerk recorded comments on a blackboard.]
4) The next week, the three-member committee got together for dinner and talked about how to draft the report. Photocopies were made of the notes for all three of the members. The committee members divided up the topics of the retreat and were to prepare a draft of a section for the next meeting.
5) The following week, the three-member committee got together for lunch and worked all afternoon on a draft. An effort was made to use the language of the participants at the retreat as much as possible. As is general Quaker practice, specific ideas or concerns were attributed to no person by name.
6) During the next week, the draft was revised by one person and circulated to the other two members.
7) The following Saturday at the monthly meeting of the Oversight Committee, one of the three-member committee, a member of the Oversight Committee, read the draft aloud, partly because no copy shops had been early enough to permit him to make copies for everyone. Following the reading, discussion ensued, and suggestions were made about possible revisions.
8) The following day during the monthly Meeting for Business, the revised draft was circulated and read aloud. There was consensus among those in attendance that the report was a good one although there was discussion about particular items that had not been included, whether or not names of those associated with particular projects should be included, etc. Such consensus is not always forthcoming. In some cases, those present ask that the draft be rewritten. There is often a tendency for those present to focus on issues of form—word choice, syntax, etc.—sometimes because they may well not have ready ways for talking about what they perceive as other problems with the text.
9) Several Friends submitted suggested revisions or additional information that they felt should be included.
10) The three-member committee met for dinner to discuss revisions to be made and to celebrate the successful near completion of their task.
11) One member of the committee took care of the revisions, submitted a version of the report to the clerk of the Meeting and the two co-authors, and is waiting to see if additional changes need to be made.
12) Because the Meeting for Business approved the earlier draft, entrusting the revisions to the committee that had drafted the it, once the clerk and the co-authors are pleased with the

report, a copy will appear in the monthly newsletter and a copy will be sent to the clerk of the annual meeting. Copies will also be sent to inactive members along with a cover letter from a weighty Friend (i.e., a respected Friend with a long tradition as a Quaker and, in this case, as a member of this Meeting).

Questions:
What can such a composing process teach us about literacy and spirituality? about the nature of collaborative discourse, especially collaborative writing? about the nature of institutional discourse? the nature of power and authority among Quakers? about ways of using spoken and written language and creating texts that may be particular to Quakers?

Let us now turn to a very different setting, an AIDS hospice in Austin. The five-bed residential facility has been open for four years now. Residents there have all been diagnosed as having less than six months to live, and they have agreed to give up the biomedical model of treatment, accepting instead palliative care in a home-like environment. The residents the first year were nearly all gay white males; increasingly they are not. As I've noted in III., there is lots of literacy at the hospice. In fact, it is impossible to imagine working at the hospice as a volunteer or paid staffer if one is not literate.

III. Literate activity at the AIDS hospice
Activity that is overtly spiritual
-Keeping of journals, most common among those who have participated in 12-step programs
-Reading (silently and aloud) of religious texts, including the Bible and devotional literature
-Clippings, posters, refrigerator magnets that include some sort of spiritual or religious aphorism
-Cards and banners from family and friends
-Candles with religious (usually Catholic) imagery and text

Other sorts of literate activity
-Reading of all the texts listed above and below as well as newspapers, magazines, novels
-Record keeping, including medical history, daily log of care given (sometimes includes comments on issues of religion/spirituality), records regarding medication, sign-in sheets for volunteers and for visitors, etc.
-Messages to/Information for volunteers and staff, including the schedule, legal notices concerning workman's compensation and other employer requirements, etc.
-Public information about the emergency evacuation plan in case of fire, the name and telephone number of the on-call person, the Client Bill of Rights, etc.
-Labeling of medicines, prepared foods stored in the refrigerator, and almost all stored material (bandages, Q-tips, alcohol preps, diapers, flat and fitted sheets, etc.)
-Writing pads used for communicating with residents who are deaf or hearing impaired
-Bulletin board with announcements about upcoming activities (e.g., support groups, other AIDS-related services available in Austin), obituaries, letters and cards from the loved ones of former residents, and texts like the one reproduced in IV.

As at the Quaker meeting, much of the literacy, in fact the majority of it, is likely ultimately institutional, involving legal documents or documents that could become legal documents if they were subpoenaed, as well as records of all kinds created and maintained for all kinds of purposes. As my list makes clear, there are many other kinds of literate behaviors, too, some of it overtly spiritual. Yet, the hospice is not affiliated with any sort of religious organization or group. Many of the people who work there or who live and ultimately die there would claim not to be religious or spiritual in any way. At the same time, many who work there, whether as staff or volunteers, are there precisely because of their spiritual needs, however expressed. Those affiliated with the hospice, those who work there or the loved ones of former residents, sometimes speak of the

hospice as a 'sanctuary' or a 'sacred place' because the folks who are there are dealing with what is perhaps the complex of life's rites of passage—death. At the same time, one doesn't have to around the hospice very long before realizing that it is not about dying, it is about living in a certain age, in a certain place, under certain conditions that will not let anyone there forget her or his own mortality.

Should we think of the AIDS hospice then as a spiritual site of composing? Why? Because people die there? Perhaps this is like Lincoln's reasoning that the field at Gettysburg was hallowed ground, or his reasoning might have been that men died for something they believed in—and men he identified as part of his own imagined community, as Benedict Anderson, author of *Imagined Communities*, would remind us. Should we think of it as a spiritual site because some people there have spiritual lives? Were these alone the grounds, then any place could be a spiritual site of composing, and this may be what we want to conclude. On the other hand, we may feel a need to arrive at other criteria for making such decisions. As I learned over a decade ago when I first began thinking seriously about the nature of literacy, such troublesome boundary cases are often the most profitable in helping us sort out what is essential and what is accidental about the nature of something we take for granted, something like literacy, or in this case, literacy and spirituality.

Here, I direct your attention to the text reproduced in number IV., a text that Anderson would certainly love because whoever posted it on the bulletin board at the hospice and the many of us who have read it and been moved by it and by the parallels we see have certainly been part of the not-necessarily-conscious creation of an imagined community—ourselves in the hospice and Whitman as Civil War nurse—one that certainly includes the gay sensibility but does not have to stop there.

IV. The text of a clipping currently on the bulletin board at the hospice:

> …how contemptible all the usual little worldly prides & vanities & striving after appearances, seems in the midst of such scenes as these—such tragedies of body and soul. To see such things & not be able to help them is awful—I feel almost ashamed of being so well & whole.
>
> I wish you could see the whole scene. This young man lies within reach of me, flat on his back, his hands clasp'd across his breast, his thick hair cut close; he is dozing, breathing hard, every breath a spasm—it looks so cruel. He is a noble youngster, —I consider him past all hope. Often there is no one with him for a long while. I am here as much as possible.
>
> I pet them, some of them it does much good, they are so faint and lonesome—at parting at night sometimes I kiss them right & left—The doctors tell me I supply the patients with a medicine which all their drugs & bottles & powders are helpless to yield.
>
> Walt Whitman, letters of 1863

Rather, this community includes all who take life as sacred, who rage against whatever they take to be injustice, who attempt to take care of those less fortunate, and who cannot escape the joy and sorrow of their own situation as it compares with that of others on this earth. Should we take those as criteria for spirituality? The questions only multiply.

Now to close. In V., I've reproduced the opening epigram from Anne Ruggles Gere's recent 3C's article, a quotation from Simone Weil.

V. Opening epigram from Anne Ruggles Gere's recent article in CCC:

> Two prisoners in contingent cells communicate by blows struck on the wall. The wall separates them, but it also permits them to communicate.--Simone Weil

On reading it, I immediately recontextualized it, thinking of the version of it that I knew as given in VI. and the, for me, burning lines that were not present there, even in an article that considered the extracurriculum.

VI. A longer version of the same text in a different translation:

> Two prisoners whose cells adjoin communicate with each other by knocking on the wall. The wall is the thing which separates them but it is also their means of communication. It is the same with us and God. Every separation is a link.--Simone Weil, Gravity and Grace. Emma Craufurd, trans., London: Ark, 1987. First published in 1947 as La Pesanteur et la grâce.

I can imagine many reasons why Gere chose not the include these lines—given the ways in which we know of Weil's work, Gere may know them from a different source, one that does not include talk of God there. Yet, as anyone who knows Weil's work or life realizes, few thinkers in this century have been so preoccupied with questions of belief or spirituality. My students and I, in writing about the situation of African Americans in their speech communities in the U.S., have pointed out that the ties that bind, blessed though they be, must also be ties that separate. Weil, on the other hand, reminds us that walls that separate are ultimately the only media permitting communication with one another and with God. Far from transparent, such communication, especially when it involves literacy, cannot be understood quickly or easily. Perhaps this afternoon, we can learn from one another as we discuss our own concerns about this topic. Talking across our lines of difference will not be easy, but most people who take their spirituality seriously do not look for easy journeys. Whatever we achieve will represent a kind of progress.

APPENDIX

A text from a non-pastoral unprogrammed Quaker Meeting

STATE OF THE MEETING REPORT, FRIENDS MEETING OF AUSTIN, 1993

On January 15, 1994, Friends Meeting of Austin held its fourth annual day-long retreat to consider the state of our meeting. Some twenty people were in attendance. This year, following North Pacific Yearly Meeting's Faith and Practice, we chose to center our discussion on how spirituality is expressed in the ways we worship together, reflected in the ways we relate to one another within our community, and sustained and manifested in our daily lives. The group considered where we, as a Meeting, had been, what we had learned during the past year(s), and where we might feel led to go in the coming year.

Reflecting on last year's retreat about children and their role in the Meeting, we acknowledged that for a long time and despite our best efforts to do otherwise, we often acted so as to separate the children and younger Friends from the spiritual life of the Meeting. Happily, this last year, the Meeting has focused a great deal of energy on changing this tendency. We now discuss openly ways in which we can integrate children and younger Friends, their experiences, and their perspectives into the life of our community. Child-care is provided by Tracy Knapp for a growing number of activities. Thanks to the leadership and dedication of Friends like Margaret Aeschbach, Robert Arjet, Rachel Berry, Kathryn and Michael Boswell, Maria Claus, Robin Cravey, Mary Lee Hicks, Mary Ellen Isaacs, Ben Kuipers, Laura Lein, and Joanna Vaughn as well as the support of the Meeting at large, our children and Young Friends have a vibrant, active age-graded program. The children's First

Day School activities this year have included singing and reading or listening to stories from the Bible, Quakers past or present, and other traditions; the children also made crafts for sale at the Christmas fundraiser and spent time learning about Colombia, where the Meeting helps support work. The Young Friends' program has included discussions of other faiths accompanied by trips to those houses of worship, participation in various volunteer activities around town, and events such a camping or parties designed specifically for them. Young Friends also now hold Meetings for Business, and the minutes of these meetings are appended to those of the Meeting. Young Friends also continue to be asked to serve on some of the Meeting's standing committees. In the coming year, we will endeavor to find new ways of including children and young Friends in the life of the Meeting.

A problem that clearly has an impact on the Meeting's ability to include children and young Friends but raises a host of other issues for us as well is space at the Meeting House. Although we rejoice in the growth of the past few years and our ability to integrate larger numbers of members and attenders into our Meeting for Worship and Meeting for Business, we must also acknowledge that the Meeting House and the Garden House are increasingly unable to accommodate our needs and that space, its availability, and its allocation have an impact on the quality of our worship and our lives together. It is difficult to feel gathered when as many as a fourth of the people present are in the entryway and hallway. Messages cannot be heard from one area to the next. Friends who would choose to sit in the main meeting room if space were available find themselves forced to sit in an area that tends to be noisier, less comfortable, and colder in winter. Perhaps most unfortunate, when children and Young Friends wish to join Meeting for Worship after a period of time with their First Day School classes, there is nowhere for them to sit in the main meeting room, where they might best learn to appreciate the experience of a gathered meeting and a Spirit-led vocal ministry. Friends painfully acknowledge that the Meetinghouse that we all love so much has become inadequate for our needs. Dealing with this issue will not be easy, but Friends have a tradition of dealing with difficult matters by living in the Spirit.

Along with our growth and the problems it might raise with respect to space, we gratefully acknowledge the deepening of community that many of us feel. Part of this feeling is related to the growing number of active members, including new members Kathryn Boswell, Kirsten Dean, Mary Ellen Isaacs (transferring from the Durham Monthly Meeting), and Karen LeFevre. Whereas in times past, a handful of people sometimes seemed to be carrying the meeting, that number is much larger now. There appear to be increasingly more people for whom Meeting is close to the center of their lives. We believe this change may partly be due to the role that nominating committee has played in the past year in getting people involved.

We likewise rejoice in our communal celebrations, and we acknowledge the powerful witness of members and attenders who participate in activities associated directly with the Meeting and with the larger community and the world. Thus, we remember fondly events we shared such as the dinner held to honor First Day School committee and other parents and supporters of children's programs; our Thanksgiving meal together; the Christmas party, variety show, and fundraiser for La Fundación , parties to welcome new members, and a celebration of aging in honor of Jane Laessle on her seventieth birthday. We share in the joy of the marriages of Joanna Peterson and Larry Vaughn under the care of the Meeting, of Brian Macleod and Mary Sheperd in the manner of Friends, and of John Barrows III and Kim Tehan-Barrow, and we note the joy that has come into our midst with the births of Amelia Grace Miller to Carroll and Cindy Miller and of Elena Felice Gonzales-Melinger to Melissa Gonzales and Michael Melinger. With sadness, we note the passing of Corrine Hernandez, a frequent attender and member of the Mexico City Friends Meeting. We are also reminded of the ways the Meeting is blessed by the ministries of Paul Stuckey's and Carol Byler's work in Colombia; Sherilynn Brandenstein's chaplaincy; Steve Finn's, John Mitchell's, Paula Rogge's, and Susan Van Haitsma's participation in the Prison Visitation Program; Janice Bailey's work with the homeless through the Interfaith Hospitality Network; Val Liveoak's and Paula Rogge's ongoing dedication to the Texas Alternatives to Violence Project; Terry English's work at Casa Marianela; the Jeffreys family's instituting and maintaining of a recycling program for the

Meeting; those who remind the Meeting of issues before FCNL, and those, who for conscience's sake, refuse to pay war taxes. All who use the Meeting House are constantly reminded of the efforts of many individuals, especially the resident; through their cleaning, painting, and gardening, they make our facility a pleasant place to worship.

Even as we celebrate our growth and the steps we have consciously taken to nurture one another and our community, we acknowledge the need to go further. This year, Oversight Committee initiated a Coffee Hour on odd-numbered Sundays, designated a person to provide information about Quakers to visitors and other interested folks at the rise of meeting, and offered a series of talks by Val Liveoak for beginning Quakers. The new Worship and Ministry Committee continues to give attention to the quality of vocal ministry in our Meeting. As one Friend reminded us, the Meeting has a large number of visitors who sometimes do not speak in the manner of Friends during Meeting for Worship; at the same time, those Friends who have been in the Meeting the longest generally remain silent. Thus, we wonder if new Friends might benefit from seasoned messages given by Friends of long standing. Looking toward the future, we seek better ways of listening and responding to one another. We challenge ourselves to share our deepest spiritual experiences with one another, recognizing that such sharing is the impetus for knowing one another better. Although forums, committee membership, and worship can help us, we believe we must strive to find novel ways to take risks in order to foster our growth as a spiritual community. While a growing number of Friends feel comfortable asking the Meeting for assistance, we are aware that others who likely need attention have not asked for help. We continue to wonder how to offer support without being intrusive. We also wish to create a climate in which Friends feel safe to bring more of themselves, including their lightheartedness and humor as well as their deepest spiritual feelings, into Meeting. As we become more comfortable bringing our full selves into Meeting, we hope to find it easier to take our spiritual selves into the rest of our lives. We seek to avoid the common trap of being over-worked but under-spiritual.

This year has been a rather quiet one in terms of controversy. No single issue has emerged to divide the Meeting into factions. Although some, especially those who acknowledge they thrive on controversy, think this situation may signal an avoidance of disagreement, others believe we are likely taking a necessary rest as we recover from past divisiveness. Yet, all agree that we as individuals and as a community have much to learn about conflict. Certainly, we are aware that we need to deal with behavior that generates conflict when it occurs, striving to separate our response to the behavior from our acceptance of the person or persons involved. We acknowledge that people may choose to leave the Meeting for a variety of reasons; our goal, however, is to ensure that even when people leave because of differences with the decisions or actions of the Meeting, they leave feeling loved. Because the Meeting continues to change, one Friend suggested that we send a copy of this report to members and attenders who have ceased to participate in the Meeting to remind them that the Meeting they left no longer exists: we are in a different place, and we wonder whether they might wish to be affiliated with the Meeting as we now are.

Those present at the retreat appreciate our time spent together reflecting on the state of the Meeting. As we examined our spirituality in worship, in community, and in the world, we developed a deep sense of gratitude for the health and well being of the Meeting. We feel blessed and hold in the Light those who feel a lack of harmony with the Meeting. Increasingly aware of the responsibility each of us has for her- or himself, for one another, and for the Meeting, we seek the guidance of the Spirit.

Questions to consider:
1) What makes this text Quaker?
2) What makes this text spiritual?
3) How can one determine or know these things?